

Identifying and addressing the needs of art and design students at risk of underachievement in their incoming year of study.

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Background and rationale

Following the piloting of the ILP (Individual Learning Profile) in the previous academic year (2000/1), the project aimed to consolidate the mechanism for identifying needs and supporting students during their incoming year of study. Through refining the processes by which students at risk are identified and assisted, the intention was to empower individual students to recognise and build on their strengths, and enable weaknesses, or perceived weaknesses, to be addressed. The project also aimed to raise awareness of both students and staff to the importance of customized and timely learning support, designed to enable a greater number of students to reach their creative and academic potential.

The school can cite numerous anecdotal examples of how targeted Learning Support has had a direct impact on the quality of the student learning experience. The project aimed systematically to test the hypothesis that there is a correlation between additional learning support and student retention.

The innovation

The ILP (2000/1) was found to be an extremely useful early 'first stage' indicator for potential concerns for both students and staff. A Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) framework of support for the whole of the first year was implemented, amounting to 5 specified tutorials at which progress was reviewed and factors affecting study discussed. Information from the ILP was referenced at the first meeting and formed the basis for discussion. Each PAT tutor was allocated a maximum of 25 level 1 students, wherever possible in their subject specialism. A record of the meetings was logged centrally and referrals to SAD and University support services were noted, forming the basis of follow on discussions between student and PAT tutors. This allowed an overview for the subjects and a School perspective of any relationship with the ILP profile and achievement, in addition to identifying any further need for study support provision. Whilst the value of personal tutors has long been acknowledged and utilised within the School, they were invariably purely subject based, often excluding students with combinations of subjects in their programmes, and the amount of tutor/student contact and support available lacked parity. The new PAT framework standardised the minimum support system available to all students, but above all emphasised the need to view the individual as a 'whole' person in relation to all 'factors affecting study'.

Following feedback discussions with SAD staff, recommendations were made to the Centre for Learning and Teaching contributing to the re-design of the content and layout of the new (University wide) ILP form. Staff were briefed as to the PAT framework and the need to correlate the ILP information in relation to PAT details. As in the previous year, emphasis was placed upon the need for confidentiality and a sensitive approach to issues of underachievement and lack of confidence. (Salter, P. Peacock, D 2001)

The ILPs were distributed and completed on the first day of induction, copied, manually coded and delivered to subject based PAT tutors within 48 hours (previously 3 weeks later). The front sheet of the PAT form was issued to the students at School induction (day1 week 1), who were then requested to complete them and bring them to their first PAT meeting.

The PAT form was designed to include:

Cover and page 1, (completed by student);

- student details and photograph
- term-time contact details
- qualifications and previous experience
- additional needs (disabilities/health related information)
- other factors that may affect study

Page 2, PAT (1) week1, day 3 (completed by tutor);

- student self assessment (from ILP)
- additional support needed/requested
- student advised to register for study skills /dyslexia/ English for Deaf Learners/ module
- student advised to contact SAD study support
- additional advice given and reasons
- staff contact details given to student
- date and time of next tutorial
- other referrals, if appropriate

Page 3, PAT (2) mid semester (completed by tutor);

- brief summary of student's perception of progress on the 4 level 1 modules
- actions and referrals recommended if concerns identified by students or module tutors
- brief summary of student's perception of forthcoming assessments
- actions and referrals if recommended
- other issues raised by student and actions suggested

Page 4, PAT (3) end of semester 1 (completed by tutor and student);

- module results
- brief summary of student comment on results (including factors considered relevant to their achievement)
- actions required (if any)
- clarifications if learning support was accessed in semester 1
- confirmation of modules registered for semester 2, recommendations relating to choice
- summary of academic advice given by PAT tutor
- comment by student
- signatures (student and staff) dated

Page 5, PAT(4) mid semester 2 (completed by tutor)

Content as in PAT (2)

Page 6, PAT (5) end of semester 2 (completed by tutor and student)

Content as in PAT (3)

All students who indicated on the ILP that they wished to discuss any concerns that they have about studying were offered an appointment with support staff within the first 3 weeks of semester. Throughout the year students were referred through the PAT system and additionally self-referrals and peer recommendations occurred. A wide range of SAD specific learner support sessions was provided including weekly small group workshops, 'drop-ins' and 1:1 tutorials, covering a wide range of needs from 'organisation and time management', and 'practical research', to 'giving presentations' and 'essay writing for the desperate'. The emphasis was placed upon an informal and friendly approach to an integrated and 'normal' activity within the School, in an effort to minimise the stigma attached to seeking assistance.

PAT tutors and the study support team fed back their views on the tutorial framework at the end of semester 2, with a view to future improvements and staff development.

Module results, and the incidence of module failure and low achievement, were correlated with ILP 'risk' categories at the end of semester 1, and following the September re-sit board.

Tutorial support was offered by appointment over the summer period.

Outcomes

The SAD manual analysis of the Individual Learning Profile gave the following results:

539 profiles coded
40 high risk
190 medium risk
150 no statement completed / or dyslexia identified / or disability
136 assistance requested (136 appointments offered, 34 students attended)
22 EFL/E2L

- SAD manual analysis of high risk was based on ILP sections 1 – 4 only
- SAD manual analysis did not include students with a disability in their appointments offered, unless requested
- ILPs were issued to all new students at School induction (including levels 2 and 3 entrants)

The University Optical analysis of the Individual Learning Profile gave the following results:

490 analysed
57 high risk
180 medium – high risk
159 action/disability
26 E2L / EFL or English assistance requested

SAD level 1 students 2001/2 identified at risk of failure end of semester 1 / SAD ILP code:
(2 or more modules failed)

High /medium risk	25
Low risk	24
No ILP coding*	34
Total	83

SAD Level 1 2001/2 non progression students / SAD ILP code:

High risk	1
Medium risk	11
Low risk	8
No ILP coding*	18
Total	38

Level 1 2001/2 - no end of year status / SAD ILP code:

(mitigation, withdrawn, leave of absence)

High risk	2
Medium risk	3
Low risk	5
No ILP coding*	14
Total	24

SAD Level 1 2001/2 successful re-sits, progression to Level 2 / SAD ILP code

High risk	4
Medium risk	5
Low risk	7
No ILP coding	6
Total	22

*lack of ILP code may indicate; late entry

non – attendance at induction

internal transfer (within SAD) data in original subject

The following lists of positive and negative findings includes those from the ILP report (2000/1) which remain relevant for this academic year, *2001/2 improvements and additional findings are represented in italics.*

Positive:

- ILPs distributed and completed during the first day SAD induction / *100% returns on Induction Day 1 week 1*
- Initial data clear / *and delivered to PAT tutors within 24 hours, day 3 induction week*
- Early indication of students requesting assistance / *all students offered appointments within 3 weeks*
- Early indication of potential difficulties
- Students utilising School learning support resource well
- Staff referrals increased / staff and student awareness raised / *further embedding the inclusive approach to study support*
- Significant amount information now available for more detailed processing, both individual and generic
- ILPs facilitate students and staff in understanding how best they learn
- ILPs highlight how students may help themselves
- ILPs facilitate a greater understanding of student as a 'whole', provide focus for discussion in tutorials / *PAT framework following throughout level 1*
- Generic information indicates students would benefit from additional support with presentation skills / *necessary additional workshops and 1:1 sessions were provided*
- The material used allowed rapid completion and processing of returns, but also showed more 'hidden' indicators of students at risk such as sections incomplete (written paragraph) rather than relying entirely upon scores/*The PAT framework offered invaluable opportunities for the 'non-verbal' elements of a conversation to emerge*
- *Students keen to discuss their progress*
- *Integrated inclusive, holistic approach to study support throughout level 1*
- *Increased student awareness and take up of study support at all levels*
- *Greater utilisation of ILPs by staff*

Negative:

- *Whilst 100% ILP return was achieved at Induction, data remained inaccurate for late entrants, internal transfers or for those students who were re-sitting the year and may not have attended*
- Staff use of profiles variable/*School wide use of ILP data alongside PAT support and referral system was improved but not 100% compliant*
- Students are not always honest when completing questionnaires for many reasons, not least the fear of admitting problems/*ILP information remains an indicator for action, not a predictor of progress*
- Students are not always the best judge of their abilities
- Accurate data unavailable at initial analysis (student subject lists, contact details etc.)/*Cross Referencing (SAM) results at the PAT (3) meeting delayed the schedule to mid semester 2, therefore raising difficulties with timing of PATs (4) and (5). Only students with potential progression difficulties were offered PAT (5) tutorial*
- *Student attendance at PAT (4) was noticeably less than earlier sessions, where there were no problems it was deemed 'unnecessary', and where there were indeed problems non attendance was often reported throughout*
- *Resourcing the PAT system from the subject base varied across the School*
- *Returns variable (some subjects did not take part)*

- *Emphasis placed upon referrals inconsistent across subjects*
- *Whilst the PAT tutor was not necessarily based in the subject, it became apparent that detailed subject and programme knowledge was preferable*
- *PAT tutor time (15mins per tutorial \times 25 students) was considered insufficient for a discussion requiring cross referencing of ILP data (PAT 1) or in situations of concern requiring any depth discussion*
- *Student attendance at PAT tutorials varied, scheduling proved extremely difficult, there was reluctance to schedule within module delivery times on the part of tutors, and some students were reluctant or unable to attend outside module delivery times due to external commitments*

Benefits

Building upon previous 2000/2001 University Learning and Teaching strategy project (ILP pilot), this project allowed the school to refine and redesign the ILP following consultation with students and staff, and embed the school's Learning Support philosophy into its creative and academic culture. The continued increase in regular utilisation of study support (SAD Study support files 2000/1 - 76 files, 2001/2 - 112 files) indicates a need and willingness on the part of students to seek help. The project assisted in the reformatting of tutor /student relationships whereby early diagnosis of study and time management problems was addressed rapidly and effectively, maximising student retention and achievement across the school.

The school is now able systematically to track any student at risk of failing who is identified through their personal learning profile and the PAT framework. Extending the scope of the exercise to the whole of the first year has furthered our understanding of when and how to support students best. Learning Support provision (generically focusing on study, IT and time management skills) has also been extended to include more discipline specific sessions for students, thus integrating assistance into the curriculum.

Evaluation

A feedback meeting with PAT tutors and Subject leaders provided a forum for discussion. Despite initial reservations, support for the project and its continuation was unanimous. Concerns centred upon the additional work-load for PAT tutors, and it was noted that a considerable commitment of resource was necessary to complete the PAT sessions in any depth. Variations in methods and amounts of monitoring and assisting student progress within the School had continued throughout the year. However it was acknowledged that a single system was advantageous in providing data from a School perspective, and gave students the opportunity of greater parity of support across subjects. Suggestions for improvement centred upon the redesign of the layout of the paperwork and the need for fewer PAT sessions, more appropriately timed.

A 32% (2000/1 – 2001/2) rise in numbers of students seeking help on a regular basis from study support indicates further embedding and uptake. In her evaluation of SAD study skills support in the School (September 2202) Jane Cooksey noted student appreciation of the facility, and an increase in their self-confidence after utilisation.

Overall it can also be seen that many students who had originally been identified as 'high risk' did not appear in the statistics for specific concern, pointing to the fact that the support provided may have indeed facilitated success. Whilst the ILP cannot be seen as a predictor of potential achievement or underachievement, it does provide an essential first stage indicator for awareness, and first step onto the pathway of assistance.

Monitoring the 'whole' process remains comparable to the tip of an iceberg. Further studies reveal further areas of investigation to be included. Unlike the iceberg the size of the project is growing, and difficulties in collecting and collating accurate data are a major concern.

Future developments

Funding from a further Learning and Teaching project in 2002/3 will assist in the continuation of the project enabling future developments and improvements. These will be aimed towards:

100% participation, an improved data base, links with attendance, links with achievement in addition to underachievement and inclusion in team of representatives from admissions /registry/programme management.

References

Salter,P., Peacock, D.(2001) An 'Individual Learning Profile' (ILP) in Moore,I. Gale,H and Soden,C (eds) *Learning and Teaching Projects 2000/2001: Changing Practice Through Innovation and Research*. University of Wolverhampton